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ABSTRACT

Thirty-eight Olympic wrestling team aspirants were evaluated using the Behavioral Inventories for Athletes. The selected Olympic Freestyle Team was compared to nonsuccessful participants. The responses to each question were assessed. When more than one-half of the subjects answered in an extreme response category, it was deemed a notable characteristic. Lists of behaviors and perceptions were constructed for the, Olympic, nonolympic, and combined groups. The features indicated the scope of successful and estimable functioning of these individuals in their sport. There was no evidence of psychological problems or weaknesses. Precompetition behaviors were suggested as being related to performance differentiations. The detailed descriptions were proposed as being adequate models for the development of wrestlers. (Author)

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PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CANADIAN OLYMPIC AND NON-OLYMPIC FREESTYLE WRESTLERS

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The purpose of this investigation was to determine the behavioral characteristics of the 1976 Canadian Olympic Freestyle Wrestling Team and those who aspired, but were unable, to achieve selection on that team.

The psychological assessment of this restricted population of athletes has several values. Such a population constitutes the "end product" of a socialization process i.e. prolonged intense participation in a highly competitive combative sport. The qualities and characteristics which are evidenced could serve as a model for emulation by those athletes of lesser stature in the process if the population is worthy of imitation. Assuming that the population members were an outcome of a program of development, alterations in present procedures, planning, and concepts could be effected where it is deemed appropriate. Organizational and future decisions for the sport could be based on these findings. An evaluation of the social value of participating in the sport could also be determined. Various myths, misconceptions, and unsupported statements about the participants and participation in élite freestyle wrestling programs could be clarified with the provision of accurate, valid data. In essence, the study of such a group serves as an evaluation of the Canadian program of élite competitive wrestling

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from a psychological viewpoint.

A major product of this comparison could be the indication of discriminating factors between the Olympic Team members and those who aspired, but failed, to attain that membership. Such factors could serve as performance predictors and may indicate repertoires of behavior which need to be developed to enhance selection purposes.

Research of this nature using élite wrestlers as subjects is scarce. Kroll (1967) tested collegiate wrestlers with Cattell's 16PF TEST. He found that no personality traits differentiated superior, college varsity, and average to below average varsity wrestlers. It is probable that the lack of sensitivity of the 16PF TEST to specific environment effects may have obscured any real differences which might have existed.

The use of trait-oriented personality tests for discriminating between groups of athletes has been criticized (Cratty, 1972; Kroll, 1970; Smith, 1970; Rushall, 1973). It has also proven to be unproductive (Rushall, 1975b).

This investigation examples an alternative conceptual approach to the psychological evaluation of athletes (Rushall, 1973, 1975a, 1975b). Sets of inventories have been developed based on the specific-environment role-playing concepts of social psychology and behavioral determinism. The inventory technology was maintained for practical reasons. Test questions are concerned with reactions to stress, social and attitudinal behaviors, preferred consequences, pre-competition and competition behaviors, stress symptoms, and performance readiness estimates for specific sport environments, in this case for competitive freestyle wrestling. Demanding criteria for validity, reliability,

and accuracy were incorporated in the strict development procedures of the test (Rushall, 1975b). The Behavioral Inventories for Athletes yield behavioral-situational information about wrestling with an ob-objectively verifiable accuracy level and/or predictive capacity of at least 90 percent.

SUBJECTS AND SETTING

Two days before the final selection trials for the 1976 Canadian Olympic Freestyle Wrestling Team, 38 trialist wrestlers answered the inventories under standardized testing conditions. Among these athletes were the 10 originally selected Olympic team members. Eventually, one of these individuals did not participate in the Games due to injury.

DATA ANALYSES

The subjects were categorized into team and non-team groups. Differences between these classifications would suggest possible psychological characteristics which could partly cause the performance differences that lead to eventual Olympic team selection. It should be noted however, that this study concerns the status of athletes and causality is not inferred in its findings.

The nature of the questions in the inventories requires that only the extreme responses (3 point scale) be considered as important information. Each question is considered as a discrete item of information. No trait or scale scores are developed. These restrictions produce a more meaningful interpretation of the data (Rushall, 1975b).

Two criteria were used to signify noteable characteristics:

1) if both groups contained 50% or greater responses in an

extreme response alternative, that alternative was deemed a characteristic common to both groups, and

2) if one group contained 50% or greater responses in an extreme response alternative, that alternative was deemed a characteristic for that group.

This set of criteria produced descriptions of the wrestlers as a whole group, of Olympic team members, and of unsuccessful Olympic team aspirants.

RESULTS

Table 1 lists the common psychological characteristics of the élite wrestlers. The athletes considered the coach to be well-meaning and cooperatively helpful in making decisions about wrestling. A similar positive and constructive relationship existed with other wrestlers. Arguments and bad interactions with both the coach and/or other athletes were upsetting. Social functioning with other wrestlers was sought. Movement in the appropriate circumstances of such interactions was easy and non-stressful. Within sport aquaintances were fairly stable relationships. The competitive characteristics were marked by striving for performance excellence even in the face of adversity and highly probable defeat. This indicated that performances were motivated by factors other than winning. A number of self-motivated qualities for self-evaluated performance adequacy were indicated.

The general features concerning wrestling indicated an attention to the details and advocated behaviors for achieving high levels of performance. The recognition of these factors indicated the degree of dedication that is required for élite wrestling participation.

Table 2 indicates the psychological features which were

evident only in Olympic team members. Any criticisms leveled by a coach were preferred to be given privately. Socially, the athletes would offer criticism when they thought it was needed. However, they were sensitive to making errors and social mistakes. They were the more dominant individuals in the training and social circumstances of wrestling. Their own perceptions of themselves indicated that they believed they could work independently of a coach, they trained harder, their enthusiasm was always high, and that they learned things quickly. In competitions, they could handle the stresses and unusual circumstances which arose and the consequences of competitions were more important for themselves than for the team. They were aware of symptoms of high arousal prior to competitions. Wrestling was considered to be the most important activity undertaken. They were prepared to train as hard as possible no matter how long or difficult the program might be. These Olympic athletes believed that they trained as hard as they competed.

Table 3 lists those features which were evident only in the non-Olympians. Few characteristics emerged.

Table 4 indicates the social, training, competition, and achievement features which were common among all the wrestlers. The wrestling situation was the focus of these athletes' lives. They wanted parents, other wrestlers, the coach, and friends outside of wrestling to be interested in their participation. Within the sport, they desired a two-way interaction with the coach and other wrestlers. Difficult training expectations with a variety of training items and competition simulations were preferred. For competitions, only periodic difficult bouts were desired. Competition was considered to be more enjoyable

than training.

Elite wrestlers were conscious of whether or not they were improving. Constant improvement was desired although competition disappointments would inspire harder efforts. All levels of selection and accomplishment were significant. The sport also had intrinsic values; doing the activity in training was an enjoyable experience. Recognition of accomplishments through a variety of forms (T.V., radio, newspapers, record boards) was sought. These athletes were aware of their ultimate goals and believed that they have to set them themselves.

Table 5 indicates a few differentiating motivational characteristics for both groups. However, as far as motivation is concerned both groups were mainly similar.

Table 6 indicates the training, pre-competition, and competition behaviors which were exhibited by elite wrestlers. The features described were what would normally be expected of serious, dedicated athletes.

Table 7 lists the behaviors which were dominant only in the Olympians. They are characterised by concentrated, self-controlled preparations for competition. A belief is expressed that they know what to do to monitor and adjust their own psychological preparation. No features were evidenced in this area of concern for non-Olympians.

DISCUSSION

The characteristics revealed in this analysis described individuals who were dedicated to achievement, were willing to apply themselves fully to their sport, considered it the most important activity undertaken, strove for self-direction, and were fully socialized and socially competent in the situations

surrounding wrestling. Like other groups who seek to achieve excellence in an endeavor, these athletes were sensitive to criticism. Motivational events depicted indicated achievement-orientation, a requirement for frequent evaluation, a need for social interactions within the sport, and high performance and work expectations. Competition and training situations appeared to be what is commonly discussed within wrestling circles.

The principal area of differentiation between the Olympians and non-Olympians was indicated as being the method of competition preparation. Olympians handled that set of circumstances individually, competently, and with no assistance from a coach. This distinctive feature was similarly reported by Rushall, Jamieson, and Talbot (1977) who compared successful and non-successful Canadian Olympic swimmers. It is an interesting hypothesis that within élite athletes, the single characteristic governing success is the mode of competition preparation. There is a possibility of substantiating this thesis as a causal factor in performance and subsequently using it for predictive purposes. The complete group of wrestlers and each subset displayed admirable and socially valuable characteristics. There was no evidence of "tortured minds and bodies", forced participation, or obvious instrumentality of participation which are popular views (although unsubstantiated) expressed in the media and some professional circles. Indeed, these athletes volunteered the self-perception of being self-directed and they appraised most circumstances in a framework of individual worth. They were voluntarily participating in the activity following their own directions and determinants for performance and participation. It should be remembered, however, that this study described the status of

these athletes. It is not possible to tell whether the participation in élite wrestling programs caused these desirable features or whether they have survived in spite of it. All that can be determined is that the élite wrestlers did not have any undesirable characteristics. Rather the opposite was true, they displayed modes of behavior which were desirable. They could serve as fine examples of specific socialization.

The behaviors indicated in the Tables are predominantly socially desirable and on face-value desirable for participation. Collectively, they could serve as a detailed description of what the top Canadian performers in this sport were like. They could provide a model for emulation by new and developing participants.

The differentiating features referred to above and described in the results and tables, indicate program content emphases which should be pursued. Coaches and administrators should attempt to modify the behaviors of wrestlers to more approximate the characteristics which are common among élite wrestlers and distinctive of Olympians. It should be recognized that this implication is made in general terms. Eventually, all programs should be individualized to maximize the potential of each athlete. However, for developmental programs and mass participation circumstances, the general model for emulation should serve as a valuable set of behavioral goals for performer progress.

The principal outcome of this study is that the athletes described are esteemable types of individuals. This finding contravenes a number of popularist anti-competitive-sports assertions. If wrestling produces these characters or in no-way harms them then participation

in it is a valuable socialization procedure.

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TABLE 1. COMMON PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS AMONG ELITE CANADIAN FREESTYLE WRESTLERS (N=38).

REACTIONS TO COACH

1. Do not feel guilty if criticized wrongly.
2. If the coach says something wrong then do not consider him a liar but rather, misinformed.
3. When told to do something, like to know the reasons behind the directive.
4. Like to decide everything about training, competition, etc. in conjunction with the coach.
5. Not upset if the coach gives special attention to other athletes.
6. Truthful when telling the coach about what has been done in training.
7. Consider the coach to have been reasonable in his demands for and enforcement of training.
8. Do not enjoy arguing with the coach.

REACTIONS TO OTHER WRESTLERS

1. Having other wrestlers say something bad about them worries them.
2. Do not find it difficult to accept advice from other wrestlers.
3. Do not torment other wrestlers.
4. Do not get jealous of other wrestlers.
5. Do not get annoyed with other wrestlers.
6. Can accept constructive criticism from other athletes.

SOCIAL FEATURES

1. Do not get embarrassed if suddenly become the focus of attention of the group.
2. Glad to join fellow athletes for social gatherings (parties, dances, etc.).
3. When in charge of some function want others to do exactly as they say.
4. Find it easy to mingle among other wrestlers at training and

socials.

5. Do not change wrestling friends very often.

6. Occasionally are grouchy and do not want to be with other wrestlers in free time.

7. Do not enjoy arguing with other athletes.

8. Do not criticize teammates when they make mistakes.

SELF-IMAGE FEATURES

1. Have some characteristics in which they feel superior to other wrestlers.

2. Consider themselves to be very enthusiastic about training and competition.

3. Will continue training even if performance does not improve.

COMPETITION FEATURES

1. If odds are against winning will still perform a best effort.

2. If have a disappointing performance will try harder in the next competition.

3. If behind in a contest will not give up.

4. Like to take an early lead in a contest.

5. They are good judges of how well they will do in competition.

6. They strive for better competitive performances.

7. They continue to compete even if slightly injured.

8. They congratulate other opponent, win or lose.

9. They thank officials after a contest.

10. Do not take a defeatist attitude if other opponents are considered superior performers.

11. Usually feel like competing when the time comes.

GENERAL FEATURES CONCERNING WRESTLING

1. When talking about wrestling they wait until they first get their thoughts well-organized.

2. They keep their equipment well-organized and ready for use.

3. Like to take part in wrestling projects and problem solving.

4. Are not satisfied unless even the most minor details are given close attention.

5. Do not like to work alone on individual drills.

6. They like to have training planned well in advance so that they will know what will occur.

7. Prefer precise, planned trips.

8. Do not like to plan wrestling procedures alone.

9. Want direction on what to do at training rather than follow own ways.

10. Are not worried by small things or trivia.

11. They like training sessions which keep them busy all the time.

12. Would not miss training even if another interesting opportunity arose.

13. Slow motion movies and video give them understanding about their performances.

14. They arrive early for training and do not leave until it is completed.

15. They watch their weight closely.

16. Seldom miss training through illness.

17. Make a point of not being absent-minded or forgetful of details.

18. Occasionally they have vivid dreams about wrestling which disturbs their sleep.

19. Unfamiliar competition areas do not affect performances.

20. They calm down quickly if they are upset.

21. Sometimes they get into a state of tension or turmoil as they think of performances and future goals.

22. They refrain from breaking team rules and regulations.

23. Can still work hard even though pain is high.

24. Are willing to try new things even if they appear to be difficult and uncomfortable.

TABLE 2. PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS WHICH WERE PREDOMINANT IN THE 1976 CANADIAN OLYMPIC FREESTYLE WRESTLING TEAM (N=10) WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER ELITE CANADIAN WRESTLERS (N=28).

REACTIONS TO COACH

1. Are upset if criticized in front of other wrestlers.
2. Prefer to be told privately when they have done something wrong.

SOCIAL FEATURES

1. Do not hold back from criticizing coaches and other athletes.
2. Will make sarcastic remarks to other athletes if they think they deserve it.
3. Will come forward on social occasions.
4. Keep quiet in the presence of coaches and senior wrestlers.
5. They admire parents in all they do associated with wrestling.
6. They show their excitement in voice and manner.
7. If they make an awkward social mistake they cannot soon forget it.
8. If they feel something is wrong they voice their opinion.

SELF-IMAGE FEATURES

1. Would prefer to do things their own way if considered best no matter what the coach says.
2. If they had the coach's directions, they could train without him being present.
3. Believe they use up more energy in training than other wrestlers.
4. Spirits are generally high no matter what troubles are met.
5. They learn things quickly.

COMPETITION FEATURES

1. Not upset if shouted at or distracted during a contest.
2. Results of competitions are more important for themselves than for the team.
3. Feel sure that they can "pull self together" to deal with unusual circumstances during competition.

4. Small distractions get on nerves before competition.

5. They tremble and feel sick before competition.

6. Do not feel bad if their team loses and they performed well.

GENERAL FEATURES CONCERNING WRESTLERS

1. Wrestling is considered to be the most important activity that they do.

2. Training effort is about equal to competition effort.

3. They are prepared to train no matter how much time is required.

4. In high training fatigue, can persevere and still keep trying hardest.

5. Do not prefer to play and have fun at training.

6. Are always free from vague feelings of ill-health, muscle pains, etc.

7. Always have enough energy when difficulties arise in training and competition.

TABLE 3., PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS WHICH WERE PREDONIMANT IN NON-OLYMPIC ELITE WRESTLERS (N=28) WHEN COMPARED TO THE 1976 CANADIAN OLYMPIC WRESTLING TEAM (N=10).

1.	Will not show-up other athletes even if they think they deserve it.
2.	Do not enjoy doing daring foolhardy things.
3.	Do not tremble or feel sick before a competition.
4.	Can tolerate the mistakes of others.

TABLE 4. MOTIVATIONAL CHARACTERTISTICS OF ELITE CANADIAN FREESTYLE WRESTLERS (N=38).

SOCIAL FEATURES

1. The coach saying he likes the way they are training and performing.
2. Other athletes noticing and talking about their performance.
3. Parents being interested in and approving of their efforts.
4. Competing and training with friends.
5. Friends who are not wrestlers being interested in their sport.
6. The coach commenting frequently on techniques.
7. Verbally recognizing positive features of other athletes' performances.

TRAINING FEATURES

1. Training content including a lot of variety.
2. Competing against at least one other wrestler at practice.
3. Receiving as much information as possible on all aspects of the sport.
4. Difficult training is preferred to easy training.
5. Setting own goals.
6. Every training session and competition is seen as a challenge.
7. Training is enjoyed when other wrestlers are cooperative.

COMPETITION FEATURES

1. Not having tough competition very often.
2. Competition is more enjoyable than training.

ACHIEVEMENT FEATURES

1. Qualifying for an outstanding wrestler award at a meet.
2. Skills improving continually in training.
3. Name appearing in newspapers, on radio, TV, etc.
4. Would train for years if it provided a chance to become an

Olympian.

5. Want to be selected for a national team.

6. Sport goal is improving in all aspects of the sport not just a speciality.

7. Want to be able to perform well in every contest.

8. Want to become a national champion.

9. Training is enjoyed just for the sake of performing the activity (intrinsic value).

10. Being selected on the club team justifies the efforts in the sport.

11. When performances improve are motivated to train more and harder.

12. Would like name placed on record board where all can see it.

13. Know what want to get out of the sport.

14. Like to know progress and improvement in techniques.

15. Like to set ultimate goals for sport themselves.

16. Are not interested in small material rewards.

17. Do not want patches, badges, etc. as recognition emblems.

TABLE 5. MOTIVATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS PECULIAR TO EACH OF TWO GROUPS OF ELITE CANADIAN FREESTYLE WRESTLERS.

OLYMPIANS
1. Competition is not enjoyable unless they win often.
2. They do not aim to be a coach.
NON-OLYMPIANS
1. Being able to travel.
2. Establishing records.
3. The more important the contest, the more enjoyable it is.
4. Do not like the coach setting goals for competitions.

TABLE 6. TRAINING, PRE-COMPETITION, AND COMPETITION BEHAVIORS OF ELITE CANADIAN FREESTYLE WRESTLERS (N=38)

TRAINING

1. Make a point of listening to everything the coach says.
2. Will not miss practice no matter how they feel.
3. During workouts, they like to test themselves on some activity to see if have improved.
4. If cannot attend training, will notify the coach ahead of time.
5. Do not use phoney excuses to miss practices.
6. They seek better competition.
7. They talk with people to gain more knowledge about wrestling.
8. Are willing to take part in demonstrations in training.
9. Keep in best shape possible in the competition season.
10. They wear the proper clothing at practice.
11. Never have a cannot be bothered attitude.

PRE-COMPETITION

1. Are never upset during warm-ups.
2. Are nervous and tense before an important match.
3. Mentally rehearse before a match.
4. Are able to concentrate on the approaching contest throughout the warm-up.
5. Would like to be able to "psych-out" other athletes before a contest.
6. The more detailed are competition plans, the more confident they feel.
7. Never worry about how much an impending contest will hurt.
8. Go to bed early before a competition.
9. Are on time for competitions.

COMPETITION

1. Do not think of how much the effort will hurt during a contest.
2. Always put in a maximum effort even when they know they cannot win.
3. If they fall behind, they make the situation a test for themselves to do a best effort.
4. Can handle the pressure in the final stages of a close contest.
5. Spectator interference does not affect performance.
6. Use information from competitive experiences to improve the next performance.

TABLE 7. WRESTLING BEHAVIORS WHICH WERE PREDOMINANT IN THE 1976 CANADIAN OLYMPIC FREESTYLE WRESTLING TEAM (N=10) WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER ELITE CANADIAN WRESTLERS (N=28).

1.	Spend extra time when have it on skill development.
2.	Do not try to read many books on the sport.
3.	Prefer to warm-up without talking.
4.	Do not need a coach with them during warm-ups.
5.	Like to be alone before a competition.
6.	They know what to do to "get-up" if troubled before a contest.
7.	If too excited before a contest they know what to do to calm down.
8.	During warm-ups they practice things which will be done in the match.
9.	Can control themselves before competition.